

JACQUELINE OF GOLDEN RIVER

By
VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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"How dare you, monsieur!" she panted. "Go at once, or I shall call for aid!"

So I went into the passage. But before I reached the end of the little hall Jacqueline came running back to me. "Monsieur!" she gasped. "M. Paul! For the sake of—of what I once



"Monsieur!" She Gasped.

thought you, I do not want you to be seen. You are in dreadful danger. Come back!"

"No, Mlle. d'Epernay," I answered, and she winced again, as though I had struck her across the face.

"For my sake," she pleaded, catching at my arm, and at that moment I heard a door slam underneath and heavy footsteps begin slowly to ascend the stairs.

"No, madame," I answered, trying to release my arm from her clasp. "Then for the sake of—our love, Paul!" she gasped.

I suffered her to lead me back into the room. As she drew me back and closed the door behind us I heard the footsteps pause and turn along the corridor.

I knew that heavy gait as well as though I already saw Leroux's hard face before my eyes.

The room was completely dark. I heard Leroux tramp in and his voice mingling with the click-click of the ball in the roulette wheel.

"Who is here?" he demanded.

"I am," answered Jacqueline.

"Maudlin!" he burst out explosively.

"Where is d'Epernay? I am tired of waiting for him!"

"I have told you many times that I do not know," answered Jacqueline.

"How long will you keep up this pretense, madame?" cried Leroux angrily.

"What have you to gain by concealing the knowledge of your husband from me?"

"M. Leroux, why will you not believe that I remember nothing?" answered Jacqueline.

"After my father had turned M. Louis d'Epernay out of his home, whether he had come to beg money to pay his gambling debts, you brought him back. You made my father take him back in. He wanted to marry me. But I refused, because I had no love for him. But you insisted I should marry him, because he had gained you the entrance to the seignior's and helped you to acquire your power over my father."

"Go on," growled Leroux, biting his lips. "Perhaps I shall learn something."

"Nothing that you do not already know, monsieur," she flashed out with spirit. "My father came here, long ago, a political fugitive, in danger of death. You knew this, and you played upon his fears. You drained him of his last penny, and then offered him ten thousand dollars to gamble with in Quebec, telling him of the delights of the city and promising him immunity," the girl went on remorselessly.

"And for this he was to assign his property to Louis, thinking, of course, that he could soon make his fortune at the tables. And Louis was to marry me, and in turn sell the seignior's to you. And so I married Louis under threat of death to my father."

"Oh, yes, monsieur, the plan was simple and well devised. And I knew nothing of it. But Louis d'Epernay blurted it all out to me upon our wedding night. I think the shame of knowing that I had been sold to him unhinged my mind, for I ran out into the snows."

"Now you know all, monsieur, for I remember nothing more until I found myself traveling back with M. Hewlett in the sleigh. You say I was in New York. Well, I do not remem-

ber it.

"And as for Louis d'Epernay, I know nothing of him—but I will die before he claims me as his wife!"

And then I had the measure of Leroux. He laughed and he beat down her scorn with scorn.

"You have underestimated your price, madame," he sneered. "Since you have learned so much I will tell you more. You have cost me twenty thousand dollars, and not ten; for besides the ten thousand paid to your father Louis got ten thousand also, upon the signing of the marriage contract. So swallow that, and be proud of being priced so high! And the seignior's is already his, and I am waiting for him to return and sell me the ground rights for twenty-five thousand more, and if I know Louis d'Epernay he will not wait very long to get his fingers round it."

"Listen to me, Simon Leroux," said Jacqueline, standing up before him, as

indomitable in spirit as he. "All your plots and schemes mean nothing to me. My only aim is to take my father away from here, from you and M. d'Epernay, and let you wrangle over your spoil. There are more than four-legged wolves, M. Leroux; there are human ones, and, like the others, when food is scarce they prey upon each other."

"Pardieu, I like your spirit!" exclaimed Simon, staring at her with frank admiration.

And Jacqueline's head dropped then. Unwittingly Simon had pierced her defenses.

But he never knew, for before he had time to know the graybeard rose upon his feet and rubbed his thin hands together, chuckling.

"Never mind your money, Simon," he said. "I'm going to be richer than any of you. Do you know what I did with that ten thousand? I gave it to my little daughter, and she has gone to New York to make our fortunes at Mr. Daly's gaming house. No, there she is!" he suddenly exclaimed. "She has come back!"

Leroux wheeled round and looked from ope to the other.

"Diable! So that was the purpose of your visit to New York?" he asked the girl. "So—you have not quite forgotten that, madame! Where is the money?"

Jacqueline's lips quivered. I saw her glance involuntarily toward the door behind which I was standing.

And suddenly the last phase of the problem became clear to me. Jacqueline thought I had robbed her.

I stepped from behind the door and faced Leroux. "I have that money," I said curtly.

I saw his face turn white. He staggered back, and then, with a bull's bellow, rushed at me, his heavy fists aloft.

But he stopped short when he saw my automatic pistol pointing at his chest. And he saw in my face that I was ready to shoot to kill.

"You thief—you spy—you treacherous hound, I'll murder you!" he roared.

The dotard, who had been looking at me, came forward.

"No, no, I won't have him murdered, Simon," he protested, laying a trembling hand on Leroux's shoulder. "He has almost as good a roulette system as I have."

CHAPTER XIV.

Won—and Lost.

We must have stood confronting each other for fully a minute. Then Leroux dropped his hands and smiled sourly at me.

"You seem—temporarily—to have the advantage of me, M. Hewlett," he said. "I respect your pertinacity, and now at last I am content in having discovered the motive of your enterprise. I thought you were hired by Carson. If you had been frank with me we might have come to an understanding long ago."

"You may leave us, Mlle. d'Epernay," he said to Jacqueline. "No doubt your absence will spare your feelings, for we are going to be frank in our speech."

"I thank you for your consideration, M. Leroux," replied Jacqueline, and walked quietly out of the room.

Leroux sat down heavily.

"I will put down my cards," he said. "I have you here in my power. I have four men with me. This dotard—he glanced contemptuously at old Duchaine—"has no bearing on the situation. You can, of course, kill me; but that would not help you. Where is Louis d'Epernay?"

"I have never seen the man," I replied.

Leroux glanced incredulously at me. "I don't know why you are lying to me," he said. "It is not to your advantage. You must have known that she was in New York; Louis must have told Carson, and he must have told you. And Louis must have told you the secret of the entrance, unless—"

"Listen to me!" I cried furiously. "I will not be badgered with any more questions. I have told you the truth. I met Mlle. d'Epernay by accident, and I escorted her toward the chateau and followed her after you kidnapped her, to protect her from you."

He scowled at me ferociously, and then he began studying my face. I returned stare for stare. Finally he hanged his big fist down upon the table.

"Well, it doesn't matter," he said, "because whatever your purpose you cannot do any harm. And you understand that she is a married woman. So you will, no doubt, agree to take your money and depart?"

"I shall go if she tells me to go," I answered; but even while I spoke my heart sank, for I had little hope.

"That is easily settled," answered Leroux. "I will bring her back and you shall hear the decision from her own lips."

He left the room, and I sat there alone beside the dotard, listening to the click of the ball and the clink of the coins and the roar of the twin cataracts above.

There had been a sinister smoothness in Leroux's latest mood. I did not trust the man, for all his bluntness. I suspected something, and I did not intend to relax my guard.

Leroux came back with Jacqueline before I could decide.

"If you bid him, madame, M. Hewlett is willing to take his departure," said Leroux to her. "Is it your wish that he remain or go?"

"Oh, I want you to go, monsieur," said Jacqueline, clasping her hands pleadingly.

"Are you saying this of your own free will, Jacqueline?" I cried.

She nodded, and I saw Simon's evil

face creased with suppressed mirth.

I rose up. "Adieu, then, madame," I said. "But first permit me to restore the money that I have been keeping for you." And I took out my pocket-book.

Simon looked at me incredulously.

"I do not understand you in the least now, M. Hewlett," he exclaimed. "You are to keep the money. I do not go back upon my bargains."

"It is not, however, your money," I retorted, though I knew that it soon would be. Naturally I do not carry

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